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WHEN YOUR KIDS ARE IN THE WATER YOU HAVE TO BE ON YOUR TOES

(RICHMOND, Va.)—July Fourth is just around the corner, when many families will take to the water. But when kids are in the water adults have to be on their toes. In 2004, there were 97 drowning deaths in Virginia, making it the fifth leading cause of unintentional injury death.

Most infants drown in bathtubs, toilets or household buckets. Children aged 1 to 4 most often drown in residential pools even while adults are present. Adolescents in Virginia drown almost exclusively in natural bodies of water. Decorative garden ponds and inflatable kiddie pools also pose potential threats to young children. The inflatable pools often fall outside local building codes that require barriers necessary to protect young children. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reported 17 drownings in the U.S. in 2005 involving inflatable pools.

“Many parents think that if their child falls in the water they will hear splashing and screaming and have time to come to the rescue,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “However, often children under 5 don’t struggle in the water and drown without making a sound.”

Teaching children to swim is a good safety measure, but parents shouldn’t rely exclusively on swimming lessons to protect a child. Nothing takes the place of constant adult supervision when children are around water.

Injury prevention experts estimate that for every child who drowns, three receive emergency room care for submersion injuries which can cause brain damage and long-term disabilities.

More children and adolescents die from injury than from all other causes combined. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) offers the following drowning prevention tips.

- Installing a non-climbable, 5-foot fence around home pools and spas can prevent 50-90 percent of drownings.
- The fence gate should be self-closing with self-locking latches above a child’s reach.
- Add layers of protection with pool covers, alarms on doors and motion sensors.
- Assign an adult “water watcher” to supervise the pool.
- Look in the pool area first if a child is missing.
- Empty buckets and bathtubs immediately after use.
- Teach children never to run, push or jump on others around water.
- Teach children to swim when they are ready, usually around age 4.
- Mount a lifesaving ring and shepherd’s hook by the pool.
- Learn CPR.
- Beware of tides and currents in natural bodies of water.
- Never swim alone.

For more information on injury prevention visit VDH’s Division of Injury and Violence Prevention Web site at www.vahealth.org/civp.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is one in a series of Summer Safety Week news releases calling attention to summertime risks. Read more VDH news at www.vdh.virginia.gov/news to learn other steps Virginians can take to protect their families.

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